



U.S. Coast Guard History Program

Alexander Hamilton, 1921

Alexander Hamilton--born at Nevis in the Leeward Islands in either 1755 or 1757--emigrated to New York in 1772. There, he entered Kings College (now Columbia University) in 1773 but interrupted his studies to become involved in some of the events which led to the American Revolution by authoring several pamphlets. When the war did come, he was commissioned the captain of an artillery company. Hamilton participated in the Long Island campaign and the retreat through New Jersey before attracting General George Washington's attention and becoming his secretary and aide de camp in March 1777. He served in that capacity, in the rank of lieutenant colonel, until February of 1781 when, as a result of a quarrel with Washington, he resigned his post. Washington, both magnanimous and pragmatic in regard to Hamilton's ability, allowed him to be appointed to head an infantry regiment which he led brilliantly during the Yorktown campaign.

When the war ended, Hamilton read law at Albany, NY, and was admitted to the bar. He served a single term in the Continental Congress before returning to private life and beginning the law practice in New York City. However, he remained active in his support for a strong federal government. Hamilton was appointed a delegate from New York to the Constitutional Convention in 1787 though his work at the convention was of little importance. Far more significant was his almost lone struggle in New York to secure ratification of the Constitution. He waged a fierce newspaper war in favor of its adoption and concocted the idea for the *Federalist Papers*, most of which he wrote alone or in cooperation with James Madison. Though New York at the time was extremely particularist, the sheer force of Hamilton's arguments carried the day and secured the states adherence to the Constitution at the Poughkeepsie meeting in July 1788. In that year, the young lawyer returned to the Continental Congress and figured prominently in the formation of the new government.

Hamilton was appointed Secretary of the Treasury in September 1789 and immediately set out to establish the nations credit on a sound basis. On 14 January 1790, he submitted his plan to the House of Representatives; and the document remains one of his lasting contributions to the foundation of the federal government. He argued that the central government should be responsible for all debts contracted during the Revolution--foreign and domestic--including those debts contracted by the individual states. Though the measure encountered fierce opposition, he finally secured its adoption on 4 August 1791.

Hamilton's tenure of office as Secretary of the Treasury lasted until 1795. During that period, the verbal battles with Jefferson-- Hamilton's natural antagonist--rose to fever pitch. Both conducted propaganda campaigns in the press, and Jefferson's attacks finally culminated in the introduction of nine resolutions of censure against Hamilton into Congress. The defeat of those resolutions early in 1793 proved a vindication of Hamilton and his policies. Hamilton exercised a great deal of influence over John Adams negotiations with Great Britain which secured a treaty favorable to the new nation's domestic economy. This meddling in foreign affairs no doubt influenced Jefferson's resignation as Secretary of State at the end of 1793. Jefferson intensified his anti-Hamilton campaign after that because he felt Hamilton to be too speculative at home and pro-British abroad. Domestically, however, Hamilton was secure. He proved that in 1794 when he played a leading role in the suppression of the Whiskey Rebellion. He regarded the Federal action at this time as an outstanding opportunity for the central government to exhibit its strength.

Personal financial difficulties forced Hamilton to resign from the cabinet in January 1795 and he never returned to public office. He did, however, continue to support the Federalist cause and remained a close advisor to Washington. Personal antipathy to John Adams minimized Hamilton's influence during that presidency, though he tried to exercise it upon Adams's cabinet nonetheless. His last two great acts came in 1800 and 1804, respectively, and both had Aaron Burr as their target. During the election of 1800, when Jefferson and Burr tied for the Presidency and the election went to the House of Representatives, Hamilton broke with the other Federalists and used his influence to secure Jefferson's election. In 1804, he successfully maneuvered to assure Burr's defeat in his bid to become governor of New York. Burr, it was believed, would probably have joined the secessionist Northern Confederacy had he been elected. As a result, Burr challenged Hamilton to a duel on the pretext that the latter had expressed a 'despicable opinion of him.' The affair took place at Weehawken, N.J., on 11 July 1804. Burr wounded Hamilton mortally, and the latter died the following day. Hamilton was buried at Trinity Church in New York.

Builder: Bath Iron Works, Bath, Maine

Length: 168'

Beam: 36'

Draft: 12'

Displacement: 1,000 tons

Cost: ??

Commissioned: Launched for USN 5 December 1896; 1 July 1921 (USCG)

Decommissioned: 30 December 1944

Disposition: Transferred to the War Shipping Administration, 28 March 1946

Machinery: Triple-expansion

Complement: ??

Armament: ??

History:

By John Tilley

The U. S. Navy gunboats *Annapolis*, *Vicksburg*, *Newport*, and *Princeton* were authorized in 1895. Their functions were to show the flag and keep order in foreign ports, in keeping with the "gunboat diplomacy" policy of the period. They were attractive ships, with fine lines, composite construction (wood planks on steel frames), vertical triple-expansion engines, and three-masted barkentine rigs for economical operation over great distances.

Gunboat technology advanced rapidly at the turn of the century, and the *Annapolis* class quickly became obsolescent. The *Vicksburg* was transferred to the Coast Guard in 1921, and in the following year was commissioned with the name *Alexander Hamilton* (18 August 1922) and replaced the *Itasca* as the Coast Guard Academy's training ship.

The *Alexander Hamilton* had a long and useful career in the Coast Guard, taking cadets on practice cruises in the summer and performing assorted duties during the rest of the year. In 1923, for instance, it served as a patrol vessel to clear the course for the Gloucester Fisherman's Race.

From 1931 through 1939 she served as a receiving ship at Curtis Bay, Maryland. In 1939 she transferred back to the Coast Guard Academy where she served as a barracks ship and then in 1942 returned once again to Curtis Bay. Here she was utilized as a machinists' and water-tender training vessel. She was renamed *Beta* on 12 January 1942. She was decommissioned on 30 December 1944 and was transferred to the War Shipping Administration on 28 March 1946.

Sources:

Cutter History File, Coast Guard Historian's Office.

Dictionary of American Naval Fighting Ships. Washington, DC: USGPO.

Donald Canney. *U.S. Coast Guard and Revenue Cutters, 1790-1935*. Annapolis, MD: Naval Institute Press, 1995.

U.S. Coast Guard. *Record of Movements: Vessels of the United States Coast Guard: 1790 - December 31, 1933*. Washington, DC: U.S. Government Printing Office, 1934; 1989 (reprint).

